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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

Statement submitted by Colombian Confederation of Non-Governmental Organizations, International Council of Women and International Federation of Business and Professional Women, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Associated Country Women of the World, Baha'i International Community, Foundation for the Rights of the Family, International Confederation of Christian Family Movements, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Psychologists, International Council on Alcohol and Addictions, International Federation for Family Development, International Federation for Home Economics, International Kolping Society, Italian Centre of Solidarity, Pax Romana, Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture, SOS Kinderdorf International and World Movement of Mothers, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

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** The document was submitted late to the conference services without the explanation required under paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B, by which the Assembly decided that, if a report is submitted late, the reason should be included in a footnote to the document.

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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We, the signatory international non-governmental organizations listed in the title above, in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council,

Recall that:

"As the family is recognized as a fundamental unit of society, efforts should be made to support, protect and strengthen it in agreement with each society's system of cultural values and in responding to the needs of its ageing members" (Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, World Assembly on Ageing, August 1982),

Recognize

"... the crucial importance of families, intergenerational interdependence, solidarity and reciprocity for social development" (Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Second World Assembly on Ageing, April 2002),

Recall that:

"Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice" (General Assembly resolution 55/2, United Nations Millennium Declaration, 8 September 2000),

"The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family. All institutions of society should respect children's rights and secure their well-being and render appropriate assistance to parents, families, legal guardians and other caregivers ..." ("A world fit for children", Declaration of the special session of the General Assembly on children, May 2002),

The family is a sensitive issue in every society, the first and the most important socializing institution, where shelter and security are to be found when facing difficulties in life. Families exist in all cultures in different patterns, and in each culture they represent a major, even an essential, component in the life of individuals. The presence of the family is a prerequisite for the growth of children and youth, just as its absence is often the cause of a destabilizing void,

The family is recognized as an economic structure that intersects with the larger social and economic system,

Changes in the functions, responsibilities and structures of families during a process of development depend not only upon their background or their life cycle but also upon their interaction with new environmental pressures, values and behaviours. It is these elements that shape families' perceptions of their own resources and requirements and of the modifications they may make in their own value system and behaviour,

The way the family undergoes transformations in its formation, structure, functions and roles is an indicator of change in the structure of society as a whole,

Development programmes and activities usually adequately take into account the family as a unit or are intended to benefit families. An enormous number of development policies, however, affect this social group in both positive and negative ways. While development should mean the enrichment of life, in certain parts of the world the development process impinges negatively on families,

The failure to take a family-focused approach to national and international cooperation for social development might have the consequence of losing a whole sphere of partners directly involved in the intricate day-to-day problems affecting society.

We, therefore,

Urge that the wide range of problems confronting the family requires that families, rather than being ignored by the development process, should be taken into account by all who have responsibility for development activities and decisions;

Suggest that the first step in seeking to provide support for the family is to have as clear an understanding as possible of how the strengths of families are affected by the development process;

Underline the fact that the situation of the ageing, children, disabled and other vulnerable groups should be addressed holistically by both Governments and the United Nations from the family perspective. The family institution has to be strengthened to cope with many destabilizing factors in society and the rapid social and economic changes of the social development and globalization process;

Recommend that caring for the elderly and family members who are ill should be shared and supported by the family and society as a whole.

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/7 of 22 July 1996, the follow-up to the International Year of the Family has been an integral part of the agenda of the multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development for a number of years.

We, hence,

Hope that this tenth anniversary will re-emphasize the permanence of family issues in the work and programmes of the Commission for Social Development and, most of all, that it will bring about a change in attitudes and policies, at the level of Governments, the United Nations and civil society, towards the family and what it represents as the fundamental cornerstone of society.

We also note, in this regard, that family-related provisions of the outcome of the United Nations summits and conferences of the 1990s and their follow-up process continue to provide good policy guidance.